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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

Truth Experienced: Transformation in Piers Plowman

BY

Alison Coleman

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH IN PARTIAL FUL LLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS.

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

SPRING 1990

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ENTITLED: Truth Experienced: Transformations in Piers Plowman

SUBMITTED BY: Alison Coleman

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS.

G. BURGER

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ABSTRACT

Piers Plowman is designed to challenge the reader, encouraging him to reassess his own assumptions about man and his relationship with God. Langland seeks to give the reader an experiential understanding of the theological abstractions that he has up to this point taken on authority. This thesis examines three areas of the poem to show the various devices Langland uses to accomplish this aim: structure, personification and the poem's two guides, Will and Piers. The poem's structure is composed of many different components. Personification permits Langland to give the reader a detailed examination of the various questions studied in the poem. This is done through series of overlapping vignettes which act like a kaleidoscope to show different patterns with each new perspective. The characters of Will and Piers guide the reader through the maze of subjects, characters and patterns.

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INTRODUCTION

The Road to Truth

C.S. Lewis spoke for many of his contemporaries when he said of Langland that "he lacks the variety of Chaucer, and Chaucer's fine sense of language: he is confused and monotonous, and hardly makes his poetry a poem."[1] It is only within recent years that Piers Plowman has been accepted as a work of art in itself. Langland's contemporaries, however, enjoyed the book in all three versions and it achieved nation-wide distribution within a generation. There are fifty manuscripts extant of all three versions--eighteen of the B text alone--and three printed editions.[2] These attest to its popularity not only with clerics but also with the new wealthy, literary layman. Moreover, the poem retained its popularity until well into the sixteenth century.

Although Piers Plowman was valued by its contemporary audience as a didactic work or, later, as a proto-Reformation satire, what distinguishes it from other such books of the period is its emphasis on an artful play of language and form. Piers Plowman is full of plays on words and phrases, puns, double meanings and complex motifs which surface and then fade, only to resurface in a completely

new guise. One's first impressions of the poem is the sensation of looking into a kaleidoscope. Scenes radiate out from an idea, and each time the patterns fall slightly differently from the one before. There is endless opportunity for change, yet as the poem continues these patterns appear to fall into a deliberate, overall pattern that one might follow to find Truth. The overall impression, however, is that this pattern results from one individual's search, not that it provides an "answer." Understanding Truth depends entirely on one's ability and willingness to learn at any given moment.

Clearly, then, every aspect of Piers Plowman works to engage the reader in a reassessment of his own assumptions about the nature of man and man's relationship with God. Langland seeks to modify the interaction between a reader and what he reads, moving the reader from a simple cognitive assessment of theological abstractions to an experiential understanding of what they mean in life. He does this by challenging the reader's assumptions through artfully placed questions or outrageous statements and by leading him slowly, through his leading characters, to deeper and deeper levels of imaginative experience.

I will examine several of the ways that Langland encourages the reader to interact with the poem: first,

how the complex structure of the poem works to guide the reader; second, how Langland's personifications force a new, more intensely personal understanding of familiar truths; and, finally, how Will and Piers act as guides for the reader, encouraging his participation in, and imaginative construction of, the search for truth in life.

Much of the early critical controversy about Piers centred on the apparent absence of a coherent structure for the poem. At first glance it does appear hopelessly undisciplined, following no apparent order. I will try to show that the poem's structure of interlocking and overlapping segments denies the possibility of any easy hierarchical or schematic pathway to truth in this world in order to force individual involvement with, and mapping out of, the way to the good life.

The second chapter looks at Langland's use of personifications. Unlike many didactic allegories of the period the personifications in Piers Plowman are not authoritarian. They are used in a variety of ways to present various beliefs and ideas, to act as a foil for other characters or provoke debate. They are fluid, changing from simple noun to symbol to personification at every opportunity. Thus they emerge as complex experiences with a life of their own, instead of simply mouthing the

beliefs of the writer. In this way, their behavior encourages the reader to participate by asking questions of his own and beginning to formulate his own ethical response.

In the final chapter I will examine the roles of Will and Piers. These two characters are neither modern "realistic" characters nor straightforward personifications of abstract values. Instead, they present complementary aspects of every man: one who searches for Truth and one who, having found it, becomes the "new man" reflecting the possibilities of the new life. Will explores the world of the soul and God's relationship to man. Piers reflects the glory of God and acts in the role of God's steward, showing the reader the glory of this relationship. Will by his own passion for exploration encourages the reader to question and apprehend reality more fully; Piers encourages the reader to continue down the path to truth by beginning to incorporate this revelation in personal behavior.

CHAPTER ONE

The Structure of *Piers Plowman*

At first glance there seems to be no organized structure in *Piers Plowman*, whose sprawling edifice, neither hierarchical or architectonic, combines themes, subthemes, dreams and passus into a kaleidoscopic whole. Clearly it is too complex to be reduced to a schematic outline or be understood simply by inserting the proper allegorical key. The various structural components are crafted to respond to one another and form different patterns as the need arises. Carefully dismantled they allow the reader to reach an understanding of how underlying structure supports Langland's aims of reader involvement.

The most obvious structural feature of *Piers Plowman* is its division into a Prologue and, in the B text, twenty passus or chapters of varying lengths.[1] A new passus signals a change in direction in the action, the introduction of a new figure or a new direction in the poem's narrative. But equally important is Langland's subdivision of the poem into dreaming and waking sequences. The eight dreams and three inner dreams vary in length and have no obvious relation to the passus

divisions. For example, the first dream lasts from the Prologue to Passus IV, the second from Passus V to VII and the third from Passus VIII to XIII. Clearly the dreams and dreams-within-dreams have no set length, nor, indeed, do the waking intervals. At first glance there does seem to be a correlation between subject matter and dream length: a dream appears to deal with one subject and ends when that subject is exhausted. However, such a structural principle is superficial at best. For example, while the first dream seems to deal primarily with the necessity of differentiating the true from the false, it also treats, at different times, the subject of secular justice, the role of the Commons and the ticklish subject of the concept of mede. Thus a large, overarching structure cannot be found, although one can impose a system of organization on the poem which is not really there or dismiss it altogether.

In the nineteenth century this absence of an obviously smooth and coherent structure resulted in the general opinion that the poem is poorly crafted:

> Jusserand's view was typical: "All Langland's art and all his teachings can be summed up in one word: sincerity. He speaks as he thinks, impetuously, recking little of the consequences of his work either for himself or others. . . .The deliberate hand of the man of the craft is nowhere to be seen."[2]

Judged by Jusserand's standard of logic and craftsmanship the structure of Piers Plowman does not appear to follow an orderly progress logically from episode to episode. On the contrary, the reader is forced to follow a winding road full of pitfalls which often turns back upon itself. However, although they still did not think of Piers Plowman as a good poem, other critics did see a structural system in Piers. Skeat, whose scholarly edition was published in 1886, was one of the poem's most influential critics. His arrangement of the material is clearly based on the search for Dowel, Dobet and Dobest in Passus VIII to XX. He divided it into four unequal parts: Visio (Prologue to VII), Vita de Dowel (VIII-XV), Vita de Dobet (XVI-XVIII), and Vita de Dobest (XIX-XX). The change from the third-person narrator to first-person narrator at Passus VIII and the movement from the question of the ideal Christian society to personal salvation provided a convenient place to divide the narrative.

Over time this sense of structure has simplified into a binary model of Visio (Pro. to VII) and Vita (VIII-XX), seen as dissimilar in subject and expression. However, despite the popularity of this modification of the poem's structure, such divisions are arbitrary and

break down under close examination. Although there are obvious narrative changes at this point the two parts of the poem have more in common than originally believed. Themes and subthemes begun in the first seven passus are returned to again and again in later passus and images used in the beginning of the poem recur throughout the poem. One example of this recurrence can be seen in Passus VI where Langland takes the simple two-line image from the Prologue of the ploughman working his land and uses it to symbolize Christian society on Piers' half-acre. He returns to it again in Passus XVI in the Tree of Charity and again in XX when Piers plants the new Church. With each repetition the image of the ploughman takes on greater significance, for each time the image returns it includes within it all the previous meanings. In Skeat's structural system these subtle connections are overlooked or dismissed and much of the actual structure is ignored.

Rather than leading such critics as Henry Wells, T.P. Dunning, R.W. Frank and others[3] to abandon the notion of an overarching organic structure, the structural complexity of Piers Plowman has merely encouraged them to search for different, more complex, structural models. Unlike Skeat they attempt to show that Piers Plowman is

"carefully planned beneath a somewhat rough exterior."[4] Indeed, they view structure as the key to meaning. Their structural models are the framework upon which they build their interpretation of the poem. A.G. Mitchell sums up this approach:

> An older way of approaching Piers Plowman was to enjoy the narrative, the dramatic situations and the human portraits. . . . A newer method has been to expound the allegory by the aid of some key, whether of contemporary material reference or contemporary belief and doctrine and to regard the action and the characterization as pleasant interludes to be enjoyed upon the way.[5]

In their search for an organizing principle critics have been forced to exclude parts of the poem. Their efforts to find a key have resulted in a gap between the theory and the reality. Nevertheless, these attempts by critics to impose an organic structure on Piers Plowman mark an important beginning to understanding the poem's complexities. Their "keys" are inadequate, but their attempts acknowledge the worth of Piers Plowman and have led to the acknowlegement of the poem as a work of art.

Henry Wells was the first critic to attempt to show that Piers Plowman is more than an unfortunate hodge-podge with occasional flashes of wit. Subdividing Skeat's divisions Wells divides the Visio into three

episodes (Lady Mede, the Confessions of the Deadly Sins and the Pardon) and the Vita into three states of religious life (active, contemplative and a mixture of the two).[6] This model of the poem's structure has been adopted and expanded by T.P. Dunning and others,[7] particularly in Passus VIII to XX. They saw the triad of Dowel, Dobet and Dobest as significant to the structure. Dunning, for example, links the triad with the three stages in the soul's pilgrimage: "the three objective states of life--the active life, the religious life and the life of prelates."[8] The active life here includes religion but on a secular level. Nevill Coghill, agreeing with Wells, links Dowel, Dobet and Dobest to the active, contemplative and mixed lives.[9]

The main problem with the "three lives" model is that it is too simplistic. Large sections of the poem must be ignored if this model is to work. For example, many of the varied definitions of Dowel must be dropped as well as most of the material in Passus XVII to XX (the coming of Faith and Hope, the Crucifixion, the battle with Hell and Pentecost). In addition, in spite of many opportunities, the poem never even implies that these modes of living have been considered as an appropriate way to salvation. Langland focuses on the need for

salvation, repentance, contrition and service to truth, but he does not specify any particular mode of living. T.P. Dunning, describing his model as a framework, states that "within [this] framework Langland has embodied two of the main preoccupations of his day: the place of learning in the good life and the problem of predestination."[10] But this framework cannot cover the vast range of intellectual preoccupations in Piers Plowman which extend from the role of Reason in society and the concept of justice to the problem posed by the good heathen and their position in Heaven. Even viewed as a framework these models are inadequate.

As these simpler tripartite models have been rejected, other more complicated structural models have been suggested to replace them. R.W. Frank's proposed alternate tripartite structure is typical. He too divides Piers Plowman into Visio and Vita with the Visio seen as a narrative of the struggle between the Good and the False. He states that the Vita is organized around the "Trinitarian aspect"[11] of the Godhead:

> Each person of the Trinity is associated with a particular period of human history: the Father with the creation of the world and man; the Son with the events of Christ's life and death; and the Holy Ghost with the period after the Ascension. A kind of chronological order is achieved by making the Father dominant in Dowel,

> the Son in Dobet and the Holy Ghost in Dobest.[12]

Frank's model is not quite as simplistic as it would seem from this quotation. He adds that "the poet is looking at man rather than at the Triune God: it is the implications of the divine plan for human salvation that give the poem its direction. . . ."[13] The Visio thus reflects in narrative form the salvation of man in the broader context of society. Dreams and interludes are devices to separate different themes, each vision acting as one thematic unit. The Dowel, Dobet and Dobest triads elaborate and expand the poet's meaning:

> This fluid use of the triad suggests that the poet did not have a fixed value for each term. And this fluidity, combined with the fact that he never discusses Dobet and Dobest individually, and the contrast between the first and last appearances of Dowel and those of the triad all suggest that the triad is a literary device, a comparison of the term Dowel which enables the poet to give twofold and threefold answers about the good life when necessary.[14]

Frank's model is ingenious and more open-ended than previous models. It can, to a greater extent than earlier tripartite models, accommodate the enormous range and vitality of the poem's debate and incident. However, it, like the other schematic models, fails because its

idea of a "key" is inadequate. The main problem lies in the area assigned to God the Father in this Trinitarian model. Frank makes it clear that he is associating the Father with the old dispensation--life before the coming of Christ--in which man's salvation is not possible. But Langland never discusses God the Father in these terms and takes great pains to make Christ present throughout Passus VIII to XX through debate and the use of Latin tags. Christ is not present in the earlier passus in the same way as he is in the Passus XVIII, but the entire poem is based on the premise that the salvation of Christ is available to all who seek it. What Frank calls the Dowel section is, if anything, post-Dobet in time rather than previous to it.

The illustrations above reveal that the apparent linear organic structure of Dowel, Dobet and Dobest may be deceiving, for the many definitions of Dowel, Dobet and Dobest in Passus VIII to XVII show this triad from as many different aspects as possible. John Burrow calls these triads "a series of attempts, running in circles and epicycles, to embody adequately in ideas and images a cluster of perceptions about the secret inner world which Will represents."[15]

Piers Plowman, then, cannot be condensed into a

simple formula model or unlocked by a single "key"; too much of the poem must be left out or glossed over. The poem is not a formula to be puzzled out by the reader but an experience designed to make the reader re-examine and redefine beliefs that he has, to this point, taken for granted. Lawlor speaks for many critics as he attempts to give meaning to what he calls the confusion in the poem:

> It is the merit of Langland's poem that we share the sense of confusion and apparent repetition of experience, for how otherwise shall we see that man must be brought to simple practice? . . .the focus of attention is not upon man's ignorance of what is too dark for him; it is upon his insentience of what has been brought into the light of common day. Langland's poem thus succeeds in communicating not a cumulative effect of discursive thinking, but the very pressure of experience itself.[16]

This sense of confusion and the various attempts of critics to make order out of chaos show why any simple, organic model inadequately describes the complex structure of Piers Plowman.

However, the failure of the organic models need not imply that Jusserand and other nineteenth-century critics were right in their view that the poem lacks a coherent structure. Rather it may imply that modern critics have been using criteria appropriate to modern rather than

medieval literature. James I. Wimsatt's comments explain some of the differences between modern and medieval literary expectations:

> The medieval concept of literature clearly was quite different from ours; we establish a domain for the poet separate from that inhabited by the teacher and the expository writer. Because of this difference medieval criticism did not interest itself in such concepts as organic form, point of view, episode, denouement, realism, romanticism and the like. . . .though different from ours, the premise from which the writers work--and it is clear that they were conscious artists--obviously had substantial artistic merit.[17]

While the Middle Ages had little in the way of literary theory, there were highly developed approaches to reading a work of art. The orthodox medieval view of language, based as it was on an all encompassing structure of a biblical hermeneutic system enshrined by St. Augustine, had a very different standard for literature from that of nineteenth-century realism. In this orthodox view literature was created within a closed system in which reality was encompassed by God who had already, through the Bible and Nature, pronounced all that man should ever need to know:

> The idea of the Book readily corresponds to the medieval conception of the Bible, the book that revealed or made present God's transcendent and absolute will,

> law, and wisdom, a container of the divine plan and itself a sign of that plan in the world. This idea of the Bible was composed from the familiar practice of reading "allegorically" for historical continuities between various scriptural books, such as King David as a type in the Old Testament of Christ in the New; of reading "tropologically" for moral significance, for example, David's adultery as representative of lechery and other deadly sins; and of interpreting "anagogically" for revelation of divine mysteries, such as David playing the psaltery as a prefiguration of the music accompanying the songs of the heavenly host in praise of the celestial lamb. Such assumptions of continuity and unity gradually led to the conception that any book of the Bible or all of them together, constitutes a totality, not a loose collection of texts, but a book bound by a single purpose, which St. Augustine called "the New Law of Charity."[18]

This method of allegorizing was not confined to the Bible but was applied to almost every form of creative activity from music to popular literature. All creative work, whether sculpture, painting, music or literature, spanned the distance between the twin pillars of knowledge: Nature and the Bible.

Writers of the period viewed their work as an adornment, a conscious construction. A work of art was a deliberately designed reflection of the world as they perceived it. Their reality already contained, through an omniscient and omnipotent creator, everything

necessary in itself and they saw their art as a mirror of that reality. It was "an art concerned with the management and disposition of the fixed elements constituting a preconceived whole,"[19] an inorganic form constructed for a particular result. This continued to be normative as late medieval writers such as Dante and Boccacio reveal in their discussions of vernacular poetry. Langland, too, must be viewed in the light of these strictures for language and poetry.

However, in spite of the belief that works of art are a constructed inorganic form based on the Bible, literary readers and writers such as Dante, Boccaccio and Chaucer acted as a destabilizing influence on this monumental view of literature. Their works manifest a different way of mirroring reality through language which by its very nature challenges the orthodox idea of the Book.

> Medieval fiction may have incorporated information from the summae and encyclopedias, but it did not replicate them. The play with metaphor in poetry stands in direct opposition to the metaphor of divine or natural writing that characterizes medieval readings of the Bible and nature.[20]

Even though the works of these writers use typical medieval forms and ideas, they undermine any sense of

their immutability. Their poetry questions, and causes the reader to question, the norms and mores of their society. Piers Plowman, too, very obviously challenges the assumptions of the medieval world. Langland intends to show the reader the corruptions inherent in the system, but in doing so he undermines the system itself.

Because medieval writers had such a different perception of the role of the writer and the role of poetry, it is only to be expected that a work such as Piers Plowman should be difficult for the modern reader to classify. Structure and form cannot be perceived in terms of nineteenth-century poetics. In his discussion of medieval concepts of structure R. Jordan says,

> In [the medieval] view the art of poetry is primarily a manipulative art consisting in the constant deliberate disposition of clearly delimited parts. Art so conceived is properly a "structure" rather than an "expression". Its elements are "inorganic" and its natural modes of development are defined in such quantitative terms as amplifications, division, embellishment.[21]

Poems such as Christine de Pisan's Book of the City of Ladies or Dante's Divine Comedy show a clearly defined, overarching, architectonic structure carefully imposed from outside the poem. The reader is moved in an orderly progression from one level to the next in a highly

defined hierarchy. But writers such as Langland or Chaucer structure their works in such a way that the organizing structure must be discerned from within. In particular, Langland's poem presents an unusual construction since in many ways it appears "alive and ultimately responsive to its own nature rather than inert and submissive to its externally imposed limitations such as rules of genre or the fixed outlines of structure."[22]

It follows that an inorganic structural model which allows for the constant movement and interweaving of themes, emblems and narrative in Piers Plowman comes closest to describing the poem. Elizabeth Kirk envisions it as a mobile, "a complex and structured whole, yet one which is complex and flexible enough to invite the viewer to watch it from a variety of angles and perspectives and to see its parts respond to each other in new and developing patterns."[23] The patterns of narrative shift from one moment to the next; the type of narrative changes as the poet invites the reader to enter further and further into a pilgrimage for truth. Similarly Elizabeth Salter, echoing J.A. Burrow, states:

> There is a cyclic plan to the whole; the poem ends where it begins. Secondly, there is a continuous process of linking and cross-referencing of sound and idea; themes and sub-themes are treated on musical lines, weaving and echoing in

many different variations.[24]

This view of the poem's structure provides a very useful model, though not the only one. Piers Plowman is also like a Chinese puzzle box: each section fits in with the others in an unexpected fashion. The overall form appears to be based roughly on the Ptolemeic universe of ever-widening circles: the circle of the inner dream, the circle of the dreams, the circle of the passus, the circles of Visio and Vita.

The search for Truth leads Langland on many different paths through the circles of experience as he tries to define and redefine the slowly opening awareness of the mysterious relationship between God and the individual. He does not believe that truth is static or fixed. Thus he defines and redefines such things as Dowel, Dobet and Dobest or Iustitia or the role of Conscience. Each new sign encourages the reader to put more and more information together until the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Truth, for Langland, cannot be reduced to formulas. The reader must discover it for himself in the characters, dreams, hints, and riddles that Langland uses to engage him in a crucial struggle to understand the nature of the experience presented in the poem.

The dream vision provides one of the most important structural means to engage the reader. Langland uses the loose structure of the allegorical dream vision to allow for many different types of interactions among his characters and to encourage his audience to view his message from as many angles as possible. A self-conscious genre, the dream vision invites introspection and analysis. Thus the dream vision, like the idea of the Book, must be interpreted to reveal truth. In certain cases dream visions can act as an overarching structure for a poem. For example, Dante's Divine Comedy carefully choreographed journey from Hell to Heaven provides a towering imitation of the Ptolemeic universe. Christine de Pisans's Book of the City of Ladies also moves in an orderly, hierarchical progression from foundation to edifice. In The Romance of the Rose, too, the protagonist moves successively through a series of walls from the outside to the inner garden in a series of concentric rings symbolic of the various states of courtly love. In all these poems the dream experience leads the dreamer toward an increasingly focused revelation of truth. In Piers, while there are no obvious walls or gates, the dreamer seems to move outward from the self to the vision of God.

Within these poems, references to former "true dreams" give veracity to the present dream vision and allow the poet to make appropriate comments about his own work. While acknowledging the difficulty of receiving an accurate vision in the sphere of the mundane world he takes care to note the large body of visions both in Latin literature and in the Bible. In The Book of the Duchess Chaucer mentions the vision of Scipio and the dreams of Pharoah and Joseph and the Pearl-poet alludes to the Romance of the Rose. In the same manner Langland makes comments of this sort about his dreams:

> Caton and cononistres counseillen us to leve
> To sette sadnesse in songewarie--for sompnia ne cures.
> Ac for the book Bible bereth witnesse
> How Danielle divined the dremes of kyng.
> . . . . . .
> And Joseph mette merveillously how the moone and sonne
> And the ellevene sterres hailsed hym alle.[25]
> VII, 150-54, 160-61

As well as showing evidence of the presence of true visions from dreams, the poet also takes care to make his dreams as lifelike as possible. The more lifelike the dream the more easily the poet can connect the realm of the mind and the soul with the realm of every day reality, the humdrum workaday world of the body. In a dream anything can happen, often with symbolic

significance, and the same rules apply to dream poetry. The Dreamer can meet and interact with such characters as Thought, Wit, Study, Kynde, Charity or a host of other ideas, virtues and vices. He may, as in The Romance of the Rose, act out an ideal as the dreamer of the Romance acts out the ideal of Courtly Love. On the other hand, he may, as in The House of Fame, be an onlooker and narrator of the action of others. In Piers Plowman he does both. Thus the dream vision as a form can accommodate a wide range of events and characters.

Moreover, Langland deliberately alters many traditional motifs of the dream vision. The dream vision belongs to the world of the mind and is actualized for the reader through the vehicle of the poem. The dreams in Piers Plowman are meant to mimic life:

> . . .the overall effect of reading Piers Plowman is more like the experience of dreaming than that of any other poem. . . . The world of his [Langland's] dreams becomes truly a wilderness at times, a world in which everything is slippery and problematic, nothing is what it seems, and rational analysis is defeated.[26]

Langland achieves this effect by using multiple dream episodes. They act, as noted by A.C. Spearing, "both to fragment the dream-world and and to remind us of the waking world running alongside it."[27] The various

interactions of the dream and waking worlds in the poem permit Langland to keep the reader confused about what exactly is the truth, the dream world or the waking world. For the Dreamer the waking world is a place of noise and confusion; all the time he is awake he yearns for the world of dreams. In this way,

> Langland exploits and discards the conventions of the dream vision, jolting the complacencies the form might encourage about the safety of the waking world and the clarity of revealed truth. Similarly he is prepared to thwart our narrative expectations if inconclusiveness or restatement best serves precision.[28]

Thus the waking world becomes a place of terror for Will. Instead of the clarity associated with daylight and waking all is dark and enigmatic. It is only in the dim world of visions that answers can be found. The multiple dream visions and waking periods, which become progressively darker and more frightening, support the idea that only the visions speak truly.

Piers Plowman is the only surviving poem of the period in which there are a series of dream episodes rather than one single dream. In so doing Langland has incorporated the dreams into the structure of the poem. R.W. Frank shows how each dream episode appears to act as a thematic unit. Langland developes a theme within a

single dream, and the dream ends only when discussion of the theme is ended. This idea is useful as a rough guide, but the reader should be aware that the themes overlap with those of other dreams. For example, the first dream (Pro.-IV) deals with the duties of king and commons, justice and law; the second dream (V-VII), with the need for widespread repentance and restitution. Though different in content the two dreams overlap in their common goal of making a truly just society. Nor are these themes the only ones discussed, for they cover not only the role of the king but also that of the Church and of particular classes in society, all of which are discussed in terms of their relationship to Truth. Langland is quite content to let thematic divisions blur if it serves his purpose.

The inner dreams also blur any easy correspondence between a specific theme and dream, each inner dream acting as a signpost for a change in direction in the Dreamer's search. As each successive dream unfolds, he and the reader are given more and more spiritual information in an affective mode. The inner dreams contain no debates and are meant to inform the reader below the conscious level. For example, in the dream of Kynde the whole realm of creation and the forces that

shape the world under God's grace are laid out in beauty before the reader:

> And on the mountaigne that Myddelerthe highte, as me tho thoughte
> I wes fet forth by ensaumples to knowe,
> Thorugh ech a creature, Kynde my creatour to lovye.
> I seigh the sonne and the see and the sond after,
> And where that briddes and beestes by hir make thei yeden,
> Wilde wormes in wodes and wonderful foweles
> With fleckede fetheres and of fele colours.
> Man and his make I myghte se bothe;
> Poverte and plentee, bothe pees and werre,
> Blisse and bale--bothe I seigh at ones.
>
> XI, 323-333

Without argument or debate Will and the reader are convinced of God's presence in the world. This vision does not depend on Will's efforts; on the contrary it is a gift to help him in his search. For not only does man desire and search to know God, God desires man to come to know Him and provides the honest searcher with the kinds of experiences he needs to complete his search. Langland thereby makes his poem as true to life as possible, for in his world God is always an integral part of any such search.

Like the inner dreams, the waking intervals act as signposts which herald a new direction in the search, but they also vary in their individual functions. Some intervals, such as the entrance to the second dream (V,3-8), appear to be an excuse for having another dream,

while others have other functions. As A.V.C. Schmidt points out: "In addition to their narrative function in forwarding Will's 'pilgrimage' the waking episodes introduce the themes of the succeeding [dream] and reflect upon the significance of the preceding dream visions."[29] Langland also uses each waking interval to mark Will's progress on his pilgrimage and to show how the dreams take him progressively farther from the waking world. For example, the waking interval before Dream 3 in Passus VIII emphsizes Will's strong ties to the waking world with the corollary that he is distanced from the world of the spirit:

> Thus yrobed in russet I romed aboute
> Al a somer seson for to seke Dowel,
> And frayned ful ofte of folk that I mette
> If any wight wiste wher Dowel was at inne,
> And what man he myghte be of many man I asked.
> VIII, 1-5

This interval shows Will in the role of the pilgrim. Whereas the earlier waking sequences emphasize sloth and indolence, this interval emphasizes action. Unfortunately, it is obvious that he has no idea where he is going or, indeed, what he truly seeks. Significantly, Will states that he has "no kynde knowynge. . .to conceyve all thi words" (VIII,58). Because he has no inner wisdom to separate truth from falsehood, he cannot

find what he seeks.

The next waking interval (XIII, 1-20) shows a distinct difference in Will's attitude not only in his waking state but in his attention to his dream. Though it consists of only a few lines, it implies that for the Dreamer the interval lasts a number of years. The change in Will is shown in the first few lines:

> And I awaked therwith, witlees nerhande,
> And as a freke that fey were, forth gan I walke
> In manere of mendynaunt many yer after.
>
> XIII, 1-3

Will is now separated from everyday reality by his experience. Haunted by what he has seen, he loses his carefree behavior. The word fey, itself, implies longlasting mental anguish with overtones of a doomed death. Will spends the time meditating on Fortune's guile, the menace of Elde, the vision of Kynde and the contradictions of Ymaginatif. These thoughts appear to be jumbled together, the waking Will seemingly caught unwillingly in the waking world. The next two interludes continue the process of disintegration. For example, in Passus XV he says, "And so my wet weex and wanyed til I a fool weere," and in Passus XVIII,

> Wolleward and weetshoed wente I forth after
> As a recchelees renk that [reccheth of no wo],
> And yede forth lik a lorel al my lif tyme.
>
> XVIII, 1-3

The closer Will gets to a "kynde knowyng" of Truth the farther he gets from everyday life: asleep he converses with men and angels; awake he cannot talk to anyone because he makes no sense. Not until Passus XX, when the dream world and the waking world meet and become one, can Will join the two halves of his self--soul and body--into one being. In essence the dreams act as a conduit between the waking world and the eternal world of the Tower. In order to become a member of the eternal world one must be willing to merge one's consciousness with the eternal, a process which Langland obviously believes to be unbalancing.

The dreams provide the loose kind of structural frame that will allow the many types of narrative in the poem to coexist. The dreams incorporate a bewildering array of debates, narratives, sermons, fabliaux, themes and subthemes which are carefully woven into a complex, gothic structure. The dreams' confusing welter of experience skillfully mimics the phenomenon of real life dreams and also serves a large thematic and structural purpose:

> Dimensions of meaning and references shift swiftly and subtly; landscapes recede or become interiorized; not only symbols but also words continually evolve, interact and even merge. . . . through their shifting, cycling, echoing movements [the

> poem] realizes a process--or better a life--of thought, perception and recognition in their effort to achieve awareness of truth.[30]

Thus, in Piers Plowman the dream framework acts as the support for the whole structure of the poem. However, it acts in concert with the other structural devices: the division into passus, the change of Will from observer to actor, the various divisions into separate episodes, and so on. It is impossible to define adequately the various interactions of the different elements of structure. Responsive to its own nature and patterned after a pilgrimage, Piers Plowman comprises a structure that demands the active cooperation of the reader; it does not release its secrets easily. The reader, enticed to become involved in an experiential battle to understand the poem, must bring his own experiences with him and become an active partner.

CHAPTER TWO

Personification in Piers Plowman

The reader of Piers Plowman enters into a fluid world in which everything is subject to change. Its environment is one of confusing, complex, interrelated patterns which respond to one another in a kaleidoscopic manner. Meanings shift and refocus into new patterns which change again or merge with older patterns for new areas of exploration. Langland depicts truth as dependent on the viewpoint and experience of the individual and proceeds to educate the reader, giving him a new and deeper vision of Truth. Langland sees Truth as a personal experience, not a series of maxims, and uses various methods to give the reader an experiential understanding. With this in mind he has chosen allegory as his vehicle of persuasion. A genre especially associated with dream vision, allegory offers a mode in which the abstract joins the concrete and contains several levels of discourse at one time.

The fourteenth-century approach to allegory is based partly on biblical hermeneutics. The Bible could be interpreted on four different levels: literal, allegorical, tropological, and anagogical. Polysemous

interpretation was later adapted to classical, pagan poets such as Vergil, who could be interpreted along traditional avenues of thought. Later, vernacular poetry was often written as allegory. Dante's Letter to Can Grande, for example, clearly shows that the Divine Comedy is written in the allegorical tradition first used in the fourfold interpretation of the Bible:

> For the elucidation, therefore, of what we have to say, it must be understood that the meaning of this work is not of one kind only; rather the work may be described as "polysemous," that is, having several meanings; for the first meaning is that which is conveyed by the letter, and the next is that which is conveyed by what the letter signifies; the former is called literal, while the latter is called allegorical or mystical. . . . And although these mystical meanings are called by various names, they may one and all in a general sense be termed allegorical. . . .[1]

Allegory was employed for a wide range of subjects from the nature of philosophy in the Christian world of Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy to the arts of love discussed in The Romance of the Rose and the Parliament of Fowls. Its realm is that of the mind and emotions--the inner self--and its characters range from simple emblems to thoughtful, believable characters which challenge and entrance the reader.

In Piers Plowman allegory acts as a mode of

exploration and a means by which the reader, through attention and questioning, can discover Truth. The fluid nature of Langland's allegory allows the reader to discover new truths about the relationship of God, man and the Church. Thus, for Langland, allegory is

> a cognitive mode, a means of discovering invisible and ineffable truth through the images and analogies of visible things. His understanding of allegory derives from the view that all visible things, including language, are signs which point to something beyond themselves. . . . he regards his allegory as a tool of exploration to be tested and proved, rather than as having a fixed, previously known referent. . . .[2]

Langland explicates man's search for Truth, a search which comes in many guises, each manifestation shedding new light on the search: new complications arise, new questions are asked, new perspectives become possible. The reader begins to formulate his own answers, find his own new awareness of truth. Constantly encouraged to focus on his own response to the text's meaning he must pay close attention to the subtle play of thought and action in every area of the poem. A.G. Mitchell states:

> If we are to share his insight and appreciate the nuances of thought we must be responsive to the actions and reactions, even the gestures of the characters, never in interpreting what is said forget who the speaker is or the circumstances in which he speaks.[3]

Clearly Langland orders his meaning through the multitude of personifications which act out every possible aspect of thought.

Personifications, such as the various virtues in The Book of the City of Ladies or Nature in Alain de Lilles's De Planctu Naturae provide mouthpieces for the author's ideas on various appropriate subjects. Many contemporary authors used well-known symbols of personification allegory as a kind of shorthand, a rhetorical device by which they told their readers what to expect. Langland does not use personification in this manner, however. Lavinia Griffiths notes of Piers Plowman that "personification is not just a rhetorical ornament but a master trope which provides a key to Langland's imagination and to the allegorical and narrative workings of the poem."[4] It is a device that gives each character multiple layers of meaning and allows the poet a wide range of imaginatively subtle means to display the varying aspects of truth.

In Piers Plowman personifications range widely from simple names such as Pernel (V,26) or Dame Werche-whan-tyme-is (VI,78), and emblems such as Holy Church, to complicated characters such as Lady Mede, Haukyn, Patience, and Anima. These more complex

personifications act and react with one another and the Dreamer through conversation, action, and debate. Langland seeks the broadest medium possible so that his message can be viewed from a great many angles. He forces the reader to be aware of the changes in the poem's level of discourse. Through his personifications and complex explications of meaning, Langland unites the abstract world of the mind with concrete reality. The multivalent nature of the personifications enlarges the poetic world to encompass a wide range of meaning and encourages the reader to question and rethink his own assumptions about truth. The fluidity of the allegory and its inclusive nature gives credence to the idea that truth comes in many guises. Thus the Deadly Sins appear as counties at Lady Mede's wedding, as characters in Passus V and as stains on Haukyn's coat in Passus XIII. Each appearance shows the reader a different aspect of sin as it pertains to man. In their first appearance the Deadly Sins are pictured in their relation to Hell, in their second appearance they confess and act out the character of each sin, and in their third appearance they are shown in relation to the human soul. Every turn of the action show the thematic patterns in a different light.

Through their actions the personifications are instrumental in directing the reader's search for meaning. A.G. Mitchell suggests that "through action and the intermingling and conflict of character in allegory it is possible to express finer shadings of thought than through any direct exposition."[5] Langland exploits personification to its fullest extent. They are lively, combative and, in many cases, unforgettable and each of them reveals aspects of truth. The qualities they represent are examined in detail through their interactions with other personifications and with the Dreamer. Thus in Passus I-VII, personifications such as the King, Cyvylle, Lady Mede and Conscience, to name a few examples, manifest the various aspects, ideals and problems posed by an ideal Christian society. In Passus VIII-XII, however, the focus changes to that of individual salvation and the personifications are appropriate to the search. Thus in the third dream, where Will begins his search for Dowel, he meets characters such as Wit, Study, and Clergy, which represent his current stage in the journey for Truth. Langland spotlights each new turn in the narrative through the actions and interactions of his characters.

The Lady Mede episode shows in microcosm the larger

action of the poem as a whole. Langland highlights various angles of action and allows the reader to draw his own conclusions. The episode consists of overlapping vignettes in which the ambiguity of mede is fully exploited. Easy assumptions about mede become problematic as the reader encounters Lady Mede. This episode is his first attempt at getting the reader to ask his own questions. Thus he discusses in detail her dress, her debate with Conscience, the actions of those around her, and her own actions.

In the beginning of Passus II Langland introduces Lady Mede in her familiar role as the false, the exact opposite of Hôly Church and Truth:

> "Loke upon thi left half, and lo where he stondeth--
> Both Fals and Favel and hire feeres manyel"
> I loked on my left half as the Lady me taughte,
> And was war of a womman wonderliche yclothed.
> II,5-8

Thus, from her first appearance, Lady Mede is associated with false. Langland places her on "the left half" where evil traditionally is situated. Various critics have pointed out that Lady Mede's portrayal as an icon of the Whore of Babylon reflects the way she is portrayed in sermons of the day.[6] The description of her dress and wealth corresponds closely to the description in

Revelation[7] and to the traditional picture of *mede*. The first fifty lines of Passus II engage in an orthodox, even cliched, allegorical comparison of Lady Mede and Holy Church. They are briefly contrasted in their dress and parentage and marriage. Holy Church is to marry Leaute, while Mede is to marry Fals. According to Myra Stokes this marriage sets Mede "not only against the 'truth' of Holy Church, but also against the love and charity the latter declares to be the informing spirit of truth."[8] Even more strongly Holy Church asserts that to receive Mede's gifts is to lose a portion of *Caritatis* (II,36), assuming the eventual damnation of all who follow Lady Mede.

Langland, while using many well-known stock characteristics of *mede*, is not trapped by its traditional interpretations. In spite of this negative introduction, Lady Mede is for Will a dazzling creature: "Hire array me ravysshed. . ." (II,18). Moreover, her first appearance is described in more detail than any other character in the poem. Since Langland uses very little description in the poem, we may assume that these details about her appearance are important to her character. She is very much the courtly lady--exquisitely dressed, well-mannered and generous to

a fault, apparently seeking only to be of use to her friends. Her beauty is itself enough to win her supporters. Langland gives the reader a portrait of a young, innocent lady blessed with good fortune and generosity:

> . . .a womman wonderliche yclothed--
> Purfiled with pelure, the pureste on erthe,
> Ycorouned with a coroune, the King hath noon bettre.
> Fetisliche hire fyngres were fretted with gold wyr,
> And thereon rede rubies as rede as any gleede,
> And diamaundes of derrest pris and double manere saphires,
> Orientals and ewages envenymes to destroye.
> Hire robe was ful riche, of reed scarlet engreyned,
> With ribanes of reed gold and of riche stones.
> Hire array me ravysshed, swich richesse saugh I nevere.
>
> II,8-17

Her ability to dazzle all who see her is integral to her character and essential to a true understanding of Lady Mede. Holy Church rewards with mercy, Lady Mede with material benefits. However, it is not riches alone that make her dangerous. Clearly, Lady Mede's temptation is especially dangerous because she also captivates and charms her audience.

Moreover, once Holy Church leaves the Dreamer the actions which follow complicate and confuse the initial clarity of the orthodox theological explanation. Lady Mede's appearance of innocence is enhanced by her beauty and charm. Indeed, the tableau leading up to her

marriage to Fals seems to imply that Lady Mede is more of an innocent in bad company than an evil in herself:

> And now worth this Mede ymaried to a mansed sherewe
> To oon Fals Fikel-tonge, a fendes biyete.
> Favel thorugh his faire speche hath this folk enchaunted,
> And al is Lieres ledynge that [lady] is thus ywedded.
>
> II,40-43

The marriage has been arranged by Favel and Liere who, between them, have tricked the people into believing that this is a good marriage for Mede. Mede, herself, seems to have little to do except agree and, possibly, not even that, since arranged marriages were the rule in the fourteenth century, the bride having no choice in the matter. However, Langland qualifies this assumption by making Lady Mede, the daughter of Fals, marry Fals. Such a marriage shows clearly the incestuous relationship that evil has in Langland's eyes. But the reader finds this easy to overlook since Lady Mede is a young, beautiful and, apparently, innocent maiden. Because the reader finds it difficult not to respond to her with some of the chivalric deference due from a knight to a lady, he easily discounts the various warning signs he has been given. The rest of Passus II, while it explores the narrative possibilities of Mede's marriage to Fals, continues as an engrossing tableau set before the reader

that does little to challenge the reader's intellectual or emotional understanding. He is shown very little of Mede as the entire Passus is taken up with descriptions of those around her, the public reading of the marriage contract and the disruption of the ceremony by Theologie. Lady Mede says nothing throughout the passus nor does she act on her own. In spite of this, Lady Mede corrupts those around her especially the representatives of the Law:

> As sisours and somonours, sherreves and hire clerkes,
> Bedelles and baillifs and brocours of chaffare.
> Forgoers and vitaillers and vokettes of the Arches;
> . . . . . .
> Ac Symonie and Cyvylle and sisours of courtes
> Were moost pryvee with Mede of any men, me thoghte.
> II, 59-61,63-64

According to Myra Stokes the issue that concerns Langland "is the danger that the influence of her gifts will persuade the law itself to connive at the crimes of False. . . . that the law will cease, through her, to punish crime."[9] The obvious corruption of Cyvylle is one result of the marriage of Lady Mede to Fals. Other results such as usury or avarice are listed in the marriage contract and all of them lead to Hell. Judith Anderson states:

> Meed's union with falsehood is obviously more than misuse of money though it

> includes that. Together they unite the means and the falsifying reason, the human weakness and its exploitation. They join to corrupt material good, thereby debasing life and destroying its promise in the world.[10]

Clearly Fals and Mede cannot be joined without catastrophe, but is this the fault of Lady Mede or of Fals?

The interruption by Theologie (II,155ff) provokes a new and unexpected turn in the allegory. The tableau-like description which passively employed the reader changes to active debate, a new and unexpected form that forces the reader to take part. No longer can he passively accept the text without thought; he must now judge the dangers of Mede for himself. The turning point of the episode comes when Theologie gives an apparent reason for supporting Mede:

> For Mede is muliere, of Amedes engendred
> And God graunted to gyve Mede to truthe
> . . . . . .
> The text telleth thee noght so, Truthe woot the sothe,
> For Dignus est operarius his hire to have.
> II, 119-20,122-23

Unlike Holy Church Theologie sees good in Lady Mede. He portrays her as a legitimate and virtuous maiden whose duty is to give the appropriate rewards of service. Theologie's interruption raises many questions. Who is

correct in assessing Lady Mede, Holy Church or Theologie? Is she something neutral simply affected by those around her? Of what does her evil consist? The two descriptions of Mede, while not mutually exclusive, cause the reader to doubt the facile interpretation of *mede* as an evil and to recognize the ambiguity of her nature. The reader now has cause to rethink his position about Mede.

At the same time as the reader is forced to question the meaning assigned to *mede* he is also forced to question the modes by which he perceives her. The more dramatic narrative form which follows the intrusion of Theologie moves the characters out of the previously authoritative tableau allegory into dynamic action and reaction. The change in narrative focus pushes the reader into the middle of things and forces him to make an active moral choice out of various data. There is no longer a single, unifying, authoritative answer. Questions about Lady Mede are hotly contested; everything--the gender, speech, action of Lady Mede and those around her--is called into question. Only by taking into account every aspect of this experience can he, like the King, make an appropriate and independent judgement.

In Passus III Lady Mede, having been taken to court, at last appears to act on her own behalf. At first she seems to be a combination of innocence and mischief, desiring only to please those around her, and again it appears that her effect on others is not her fault. Her followers come to her without any machinations on her part. But, as the picture slowly focuses on Mede's own actions, the reader becomes aware that she is not entirely guiltless, for she deliberately uses her ability to dazzle the eyes of her beholders to corrupt them. She corrupts not only civil law but also the religious courts, giving bribes to free men from just punishment even in the matter of penance for sin (III,51ff). When she acts on her own, she desires that the guilty be allowed to escape just punishment, with the result that their souls will be damned. Lest we are in any doubt as to her effect on people, Conscience lists her crimes, making an impassioned speech against her influence on the king and clearly showing her influence in the courts:

> Ther she is wel with the kyng, wo is the reaume--
> For she is favorable to Fals and defouleth truthe ofte.
> By Jesus! with hire jeweles youre justice she shendeth
> And lith ayein the lawe and letteth hym the gate,
> That feith may noght have his forth, hire floryns go so thikke.
> She ledeth the lawe as hire list and lovedaies maketh

> And doth men lese thorugh hire love that lewe myghte wynne.
>
> III,153-59

Lady Mede, however, with the wisdom of one who knows the world, portrays herself in a very different light: she is the just reward of the king to his vassals for which he is loved, the gift of a master to his servant for good service, the gift of charity to the less fortunate (III,209-27). This is the crux of Mede's ambiguous double nature: should she be seen as appropriate reward for services rendered or as a bribe? In her reply to Conscience, Lady Mede obscures the issue by bringing up the war in Normandy, thus directing attention away from an essential truth mirrored allegorically by Lady Mede to the accidents of contemporary events:

> Withouten pite, pilour, povere men thow robbedest
> And bere hire bras at thi bak to Caleis to selle,
> Ther I lafte with my lord his lif for to save.
> I made his men murye and mournynge lette;
> I batred hem on the bak and boldede hire hertes,
> And dide hem hoppe for hope to have me at wille.
>
> III,195-200

Losing sight of her essential character, the reader is blinded again by Mede's wealth and apparent generosity. Conscience carefully brings the debate back to essentials; pointing out that there are two different

kinds of mede--that of God and that of man--he shows them to be mutually exclusive. However, the final argument against Mede is her own actions when she attempts to free Wrong from just punishment. Reason speaks against her and states categorically that ". . . Mede in moot-halle on men of lawe wynke,/And thei laughynge lope to hire and lefte Reson manye" (IV,152-53). Lady Mede, through action and debate, is finally revealed as evil masquerading as good.

The Lady Mede episode explores the personification of mede in detail, studying its character, its place in life as it is and life as it should be. Each of the characters in this episode clarifies Mede's nature, but rather than tell the reader directly, permit him to make his own judgement from the actions of the narrative. A.G. Mitchell says:

> It is not that the allegory, the thought, is clear at this or that point where Meed acts or speaks in a way that suggests she may be venality or cupidity or something else and that the matter in between has only a loose connexion with these passages in which the allegory seems to be clear. The thought does not merely shine out in separate speeches and situations. It develops through the whole movement of the narrative.[11]

The reader is given not only an intellectual understanding of mede through the authoritative speech of

Holy Church and the following tableau but also an experiential one through the use of action, dialogue and debate. The actions and dialogues of the various characters--King, Lady Mede, Conscience and Reason--force the reader to judge for himself. By the end of the episode Mede is shown to be a danger; her arguments fall apart and her actions damn her; any good she does is outweighed by her damage to Iustitia and the rule of law. The reader is not allowed to accept the authority of Holy Church without question. Conflicting evidence and new situations cause him to question the simple answer of Holy Church. Each successive layer of information is carefully exposed and the evidence clearly laid out. The reader integrates each new point of view with previous material. Because the evidence and the point of view change rapidly the reader is constantly forced to change his judgement and to be open to each new experience. He becomes fully engaged with the poem whether or not he agrees with the argument.

The movement in Piers is from emblematic allegory to narrative allegory. For example, Holy Church appears in Piers Plowman as a two-dimensional figure. She is called up to answer Will's questions and open further discussion on the nature of salvation and the role of the Church.

She states her views as though they are laws, not to be disputed or open to discussion. Lady Mede, displayed by Holy Church as the Fals, is a more ambiguous character. By exploring the different questions that Lady Mede's character raises, the reader can experience the dangers and guile of the false. Wherever possible Langland's personifications interact with one another, thus allowing much greater involvement by the reader. Rather than use an emblem which relies heavily on authority and implies a hierarchical principle between man and God, he allows the personifications to debate as well as instruct, to show weakness as well as strength. While not denying the idea of a hierarchical principle between man and God, Langland formulates a democratic arena for his pilgrim. He instructs by means of involving the reader in the narrative and allowing him to draw his own conclusions. His characters have life and react in a lifelike manner to the various stimuli.

This format is not unique to the episode of Lady Mede; the layered vignettes occur again in a larger context in the definitions of Dowel, Dobet and Dobest. Each new character gives the Dreamer a new focus, a new truth about the triad. Each new statement stands well alone but is also affected by the setting, the Dreamer

and the previous definition, its truth being shown as relative. The intellectual and affective approaches to Truth open many new paths of exploration. Truth appears in many different guises, each interlocked with the other in kaleidoscopic fashion. There is an obvious change in the point of view of the Dreamer in Passus VIII from objective to personal, but subtler changes occur throughout the poem by Langland's adroit use of character. Each new angle throws new light on the subject and challenges the reader to participate and solve the riddle. Themes and subthemes are portrayed by sets of characters and individuals. For example, in Passus VIII to X the personifications--Thought, Wit, Dame Studie, Clergie and Scripture--represent the intellectual pursuit of Truth and also correspond to the world of the Prologue. In these passus Truth is pursued without taking God into account, as in the Prologue in which people pursue their ambitions not seeing, or seeking, either the Tower or the Dale. Each of the characters in Passus VIII to X promises to show Will the Truth without involving him except intellectually. Moreover, the personifications are presented in their natural order as particular aspects and movements of study so that each follows the other in logical order. Thought leads to Wit

which leads to Studie and so on. Each personification is a character in his own right playing in a new vignette, but they all work together to form a model of intellectual labour. As in the Lady Mede episode Langland moves quickly, highlighting each character for a moment before going on to the next. While each character presents a point of view, each is also part of a larger vignette which in turn fits into the overall pattern of the poem. For Langland much of the business of understanding Truth is placing it in the proper context. Thus he will return again and again to a subject, showing it in a different context each time.

The episode of Haukyn, which sums up much of Langland's thought on sin and repentance, focuses attention once more on the subject of personal Christian behavior. In the Haukyn episode, set as it is between Will's budding knowledge of the road to salvation and the great visions yet to come, lies the problems of the good man in the world in a new guise. Haukyn personifies the secular life, the life of the people in the field of the Prologue, the life of the layperson who believes in God and his salvation but is caught in the concerns of the world.

Will meets Haukyn almost immediately after he gains

Pacience and Conscience as fellow pilgrims. Together Pacience and Conscience fulfill the roles of Reason, Conscience and Repentance in Passus IV and V. Haukyn meets all three and is persuaded to tell Conscience his story (XIII,224ff). Haukyn, in his own estimation, is a good man and a good worker. He does his job as well as he knows how and tries to be honest and fair in his dealings with other people, even though such behavior does not give great material rewards. He is the image of the Common Man of any era:

> And that am I, Actif, that ydelnesse hatie;
> For alle trewe travaillours and tiliers of the erthe,
> Fro Mighelmesse to Mighelmesse I fynde hem with wafres.
> "Beggeris and bidderis of my breed craven,
> Faitours and freres and folk with brode crounes.
> I fynde payn for the Pope and provendre for his palfrey,
> And I hadde nevere of hym, have God my trouthe,
> Neither provendre ne personage yet of the Pope's yifte."
>
> XIII, 238-45

Haukyn sees himself as a good-hearted fellow who minds his own business and wishes others would mind theirs. Chiefly concerned with the day-to-day matters of living, he does not pay much attention to his spiritual life beyond going to church on Sunday. But, on the whole, he is completely satisfied with himself.

Langland now changes the point of view to show the

effects of ignoring the spiritual life; the reader is shown his "cote of Cristendom" (XIII, 273). The Deadly sins are seen in a new context in their relationship to the individual soul. Here Langland shows that, unlike the pageant of the Sins in Passus V, sin usually disguises itself. The new context shows how easily sin is committed and forgotten, and how easily it can mount up over time. Haukyn has no idea how badly he has stained his coat until Pacience and Conscience tell him. Langland shows clearly that the chief cause for Haukyn's sins is his desire to please those around him: "Al he wode that men wiste of werkes and of wordes/Which myghte plese the peple and preisen hymselve" (XIII, 311-12). The greatest danger of living in the world is the seductive desire for praise, since such a desire leads to lies and deceit and separates one from God.

With this insight framing his perspective the reader is shown a close-up of the stained "cote of Cristendom," the sins themselves and the consequences of yielding to temptation:

> It was fouler bi fele fold than it first semed.
> It was bidropped with wrathe and wikkede wille,
> With envye and yvel speche entisynge to fighte,
> Lying and lakkynge and leve tonge to chide;
> Al that he wiste wikked by any wight, tellen it.
> And blame men bihynde hir bak and bidden hem meschaunce.
>
> XIII, 319-24

The sins, themselves, are petty but they have serious consequences. The very fact that they are small lulls men into a false state of confidence even though the sins are, at the same time, separating them from God:

> In haly daies at holy chirche, whan ich herde masse
> Hadde I nevere wille, woot God, witterly to beseche
> Mercy for my mysdedes, that I ne moorned moore
> For losse of good, leve me, than for likames giltes;
> As, if I hadde dedly synne doon, I dredde noght that so soore
> As when I lened and leved it lost or longe er it were paied.
>
> XIII, 383-89

At this point Langland moves the focus again to show the underlying cause as Sloth. Unlike modern depictions of sloth as a desire to do nothing, Langland's portrayal of it in Passus V and again in Passus XIII shows that it hides away under the guise of enjoyable activity. As Sloth himself states, "I kan noght parfitly my Paternoster as the preest it syngeth/But I kan rymes of Robyn Hood and Randolf Erl of Chester" (V,395-96). Sloth soothes man in idle luxury, preventing his awareness of his sins and his repentance. Sloth damns a man by dulling his awareness and condemning him by default. Langland also shows how a man like Haukyn, who represents the active life, can be deceived and damned by sloth:

> Ac whiche ben the braunches that bryngen a man to

sleuthe?
Is whan a man moorneth noght for hise mysdedes, ne
maketh no sorwe.
Ac penaunce that the preest enjoyneth parfourneth
yvele
Dooth non almesdede, dred hym of no synne,
Lyveth ayein the bileve and no lawe holdeth.
Ech day is halyday with hym or an heigh ferye,
And if he aught wol here, it is an harlotes tonge.
Whan men carpen of Crist or of clennesse of soule,
He wexeth wroth and wol noght here but wordes of
murthe
Penaunce and povere men and the passion of seintes--
He hateth to here therof and alle that it telleth.
Thise ben the braunches, beth war! that bryngen a
man to wanhope.

XIII, 409-20

In the parade of the Deadly Sins in Passus V the reader sees the sins as essences, appearing by themselves unattached to a human being. The Haukyn episode takes up the question not of what the sin is but rather how sin affects the individual soul. Thus it is the context for sin that is explored here. Through the figures of Haukyn and his coat Langland succeeds in bringing the results of sin into focus. What has begun as small errors has grown into the soul's death and damnation.

The Haukyn episode up to this point has three overlapping vignettes: Haukyn's estimate of himself, the "cote of Christendom," and the action of sin. Each of these vignettes provides the reader with a new focus and a new aspect of truth. Like the Lady Mede episode the Haukyn episode can be divided into several scenes of

action; unlike the Lady Mede episode the questions raised by Haukyn are relatively simple. The episode may be divided into two parts: the ease of falling into sin and its results and the way to cleanse oneself from sin and its evil effects.

In Passus XIV Pacience teaches Haukyn the meaning of true contrition and confession. In the previous passus Haukyn has confessed his sins. Now he is shown the true path that will enable him to keep his coat clean or wash it as needed. He must become aware of his sins and, through contrition, penance and patience, ask God to remove them. As well, Langland discusses the dangers of wealth to one's salvation showing that, while riches will not themselves bring damnation, great wealth does bring with it many temptations and may be instrumental in buffering man from God. Humility, an essential virtue to save the soul, is hard to maintain when wealth separates and elevates one from the rest of the world.

The problems of Haukyn in this episode are rooted in problems which Langland has previously examined: the role of the laity in the World, the dangers of the World and Sin, the way to mercy and the role of wealth and poverty in salvation. The episode echoes with reminders of the Prologue, as, for example, the good minstrels.[12]

Through Haukyn Langland invites the reader into a discussion of the advantages of poverty and the disciplines of salvation. The Haukyn episode shows what contrition involves and how the will must work in concert with virtue and conscience, how one virtue brings others with it. This episode marks a turning point for Will. As he learns to understand the relation of the workaday world to God, he and the reader can now move forward to the more difficult mystical understanding of God's relationship to man.

In Passus XV to XX Langland returns to a more orthodox allegorical presentation. However, it is not typical authoritarian description. Unlike the previous vignettes the focus of the narrative is not on the Dreamer. The action takes place offstage and is seen through the eyes of personiffcations who relay it to Will and the reader. The reader is no longer asked merely to judge moral issues but to move to a deeper level of interaction with the poem and experience anew the salvation of mankind.

With the appearance of Anima in Passus XV the personifications take on more than one meaning. Thus Anima is Thought, Memory, Reason, Conscience, Love and Spirit all at the same time. The Tree of Charity changes

its meaning with each new question. Abraham is both patriarch and faith. As Daniel Murtaugh explains:

> [these] multiple identities exemplify Langland's clearest use of biblical typology and show the merging of different levels of meaning which the dreamer had been trying so hard to reconcile. Historical time refracts in them as they approach its intersection with eternity in the Redemption.[13]

This merging of different levels of meaning permits the reader to have an experiential understanding of the subject. The meanings of the personifications are deepened, expanded and displayed in the context of their relationship to God. However, the meanings are not explicitly laid out for the reader. More often than any other portion of the poem the reader must decide for himself what the poem is saying in relation to his own experience of God. Thus his understanding is more experiential than intellectual.

With the entrance of Christ Langland gives the reader the Truth on which the entire poem rests. However, the scenes of the Crucifixion, Resurrection and Harrowing of Hell are related through Will's eyes and seem unaccountably distant. The unadorned figure of Christ is never seen, for he is always clothed in his human disguise. "This Jesus of his gentries wol juste in Piers

armes,/In his helm and his haubergeon--human natura" (XVIII,22-23). In human experience the human, subjective, material mediator (i.e. Will, Piers, the reader) cannot be ignored. Ultimately, for all practical intents and purposes, it remains the only focus for the truth in the world. The process of redemption is an end never achieved but continually sought. The experience of Christ is an aenigma hidden in the mysteries of the Godhead and focused through the virtues and saints who mediate to Christ for man. The reader is shown anew how man's symbols represent the mystery of man's relationship to God.

After the powerful scenes of Christ, Langland lays out a new vignette, that of the beginning of the Church. The Church is the vehicle through which man may search for redemption. In Passus XIX the Church is seen in eternity, militant and victorious. In Passus XX Langland presents the contemporary church as the church in time caught between the Tower and the Dale and hardpressed by its enemies. Once again the reader is drawn into narrative allegory as he watches the Church, beset by greater and greater struggles, weaken against the coming of the Antichrist. This is not presented as a moral choice but as a warning; it is the contemporary Church

viewed as Langland sees it, under siege. In the final passus of the poem the reader is carried by the narrative, no longer asked to make moral judgements but, instead, to become aware of the desperate plight of the contemporary church. Thus Langland ends where he began, in a pilgrimage for Truth.

Langland's personifications are essential to the aims and impact of Piers Plowman. Their liveliness and flexibility allow them to act as the reader's guides.

CHAPTER THREE.

Will and Piers

Piers Plowman, like other allegories, attempts a union of two realities--physical and the spiritual. Thus the personifications in _Piers Plowman_ speak to the realm of the spirit but act in physical reality: Gluttony is an abstraction, but the tavern he appears in is not. As Elizabeth Kirk points out, such a literary conjunction echoes a fundamental interaction of human perception:

> Man lives in two realities, that of human experience in time and the metaphysical reality, given and immutable. The tension between them points toward a potential state of resolution, in which an effort of the individual equivalent to a sustained act of creation brings to birth new experiential knowledge or cognitive experience in which the two are synthesized like man's two eyes in focused vision.[1]

Unlike the focused vision of the eyes, the resolution of human experience and metaphysical reality requires conscious work and thought. One cannot reach this goal through the simple mechanical exchange of information. It is not enough to tell someone the truth; it must be experienced. The personifications encountered in _Piers Plowman_, then, encourage the reader to question, analyze and redefine the signifying power of symbols.

Will and Piers occupy a special place in this quest for truth. Unlike the other characters that simply exhibit a particular aspect of truth, they search for a focused vision of truth. Neither personifications nor an early version of the "realistic" characters of later novels, these characters present two complementary aspects of Everyman's position in the visionary world: the seeker/pilgrim and the initiate/teacher. Piers reflects the glory of the incarnate Christ; Will argues, debates and questions as he slowly, fumbling, finds the true path. However, although Will and Piers appear at first to be total opposites, they are complementary halves of Everyman. Indeed Piers progresses from the same starting point as Will. In Passus VII Piers acts as a guide to Truth for the entire company, but by the end of the passus turns into a seeker himself. Slowly the character of Piers becomes a more faithful source of knowledge until, by the end of the poem, he becomes a type of Christ. Will, too, grows to become a focus of the vision of salvation. Together they define and delineate the path to Truth, showing both the glory of the Truth and the long struggle to find it. However, though Piers appears to be assured of salvation, Will receives the focus of most of the attention.

Will, acting as narrator and dreamer, joins the

everyday, mundane world of human experience with the metaphysical world of the poem. He appears as the reader's representative, asking the questions and arguing with the characters in place of the reader. A colourful rather scatter-brained individual, he brings order to the confusing array of episodes of the poem. Indeed, it is because Will is so completely realized by the author that the reader becomes so engrossed in the poem. Langland structures the quest for truth in the order in which the Dreamer is able to comprehend it. Thus the first two dreams serve to open the Dreamer's mind to the spiritual life; only then does he act. Will's ignorance, innocence and bumbling theories engage the reader, encouraging him to ask questions:

> . . . the most important distinction of Langland's poem is that it presents a highly individualized Dreamer whose personality--in contrast to the faceless narrators of most other classical and medieval dream visions--gives coherency to the form and the content of his visions. Langland shows through his Dreamer that the ultimate value of truth lies in one's own perceptions of it.[2]

Will is the guide on the search for Truth; he asks naive questions, finds problems in the simplest of answers, willfully misunderstands time-honoured cliches and generally leads the reader to new avenues of thought.

The reader begins the poem under a sign of contradic-

tion, receiving instruction about Truth from a man who is searching only for marvels but who has suprising depths. Yet the reader, who at first comfortably assumes superiority, is often challenged by Will's questions and assumptions. Initially Will appears as a character who knows nothing about the soul, who pays lip-service to the conventions of the Church. In the opening lines of the poem Langland presents him as an inferior, flawed human being. Will is not searching for Truth at all, he is searching for "wondres" to be amused:

> I shoop me into shroudes as I a sheep were,
> In habite as an heremite unholy of werkes,
> Wente wide in this world wondres to here.
> Ac on a May morwenynge on Malverne hilles
> Me bifel a ferly, of Fairye me thoghte.
> I was wery forwandred and wente me to reste.
>
> Pro:, 2-7

In the first two dreams Will remains rather frivolous and stupid, forever missing the point of conversation. For the most part he is present only as an observer in these two dreams. However, they are seen through Will's eyes and take on a little of his character. He appears as an active participant only once, when he speaks to Holy Church, and it is obvious from his questions that he understands very little of the conversation. She gives Will an explanation of the Field and the Tower and places him firmly in the world as God sees it--Heaven, Hell and

Middle Earth all in their proper proportion. However, when asked by Will, she does not elaborate on the means of salvation. Holy Church remains an enigmatic emblem. Although she is unquestionably an authoritative personification, her dogmatic exposition of Truth--"When alle tresors arn tried . . . .Treuth is the beste" (I,85)--ignores the possibility that her human student might need anything to further his understanding. In the speech of Holy Church, Will learns by rote what is needful to save his soul but has no "kynde knowynge," and the information has no effect on him and his actions. Indeed, this kind of passivity is played on throughout Passus I-VII and is reflected in many of the characters. The king, for example, takes no action until forced by Conscience and Reason, and the law allows itself to become corrupt because it will not prevent the match between Lady Mede and Fals. From the first it is apparent that Will has only the haziest idea of the reasons for his search and for what he is searching. He appears bewildered by Holy Church's speech to him and comments several times on his lack of "kynde knowyng" or instinctive understanding.

Langland makes use of Will's ignorance to give the reader additional concepts and angles of perception. This in turn encourages the reader to reassess his own

assumptions. One of the most important concepts in Piers Plowman, that of "Dowel," begins as a mistaken assumption. Dowel is introduced as part of the Pardon--"Do wel and have wel and God shal have thi soul" (VII, 112)--but Will changes it into a verbal noun:

> Al this maketh me on metels to thynke--
> And how the preest preved no pardon to Dowel,
> And demed that Dowel indulgences passed
> Biennals and triennals and bisshopes lettres,
> And how Dowel at the Day of Dome is digneliche underfongen,
> And passeth al the pardon of Seint Petres cherche.
> VII, 168-73

This action effectively freezes its active qualities but widens its signifying properties. Its definition is now open to question. Thus Will remains unclear as to whether Dowel is a thing or a person. He states, "And how the preest preved no pardon to Dowel" (VII, 169) as though Dowel were a person, but he also compares Dowel favourably against papal indulgences as though it were a thing: "Ac to trust on thise triennals--trewely, me thynketh,/ It is noght so siker for the soule, certes, as Dowel" (VII, 180-81). Then he changes his mind again at the beginning of Passus VIII, asking all and sundry where Dowel lives. At the same time he is well aware of its verbal dimension: "And whoso synneth, I seide,"[certes] dooth yvele . . . . And Dowel and Do-yvele mowe noght dwelle togideres" (VIII,23-24). This ambiguity about the

nature of Dowel and its counterparts allows Langland to suggest a variety of answers to the question, "What is Dowel?" Yet the nature of Dowel becomes a part of the quest for Truth, since doing well forms an essential part of salvation. From verbs with a very limited definition, Dowel, Dobet and Dobest become remarkably flexible, changing with each new change in direction of the search. The definitions are accretive and interact with one another so that by the end of the poem the reader has a holistic view of the many aspects of Truth.

Will begins his search in a light-hearted manner, enjoying the walk and its adventures without paying a great deal of attention to its purpose. He is like the pilgrim in Passus V (V,515-36), whose purpose in pilgrimage appears to be the pleasure in telling everyone where he went and how holy he is. Likewise, Will treats his quest as if it were a chanson d'aventure, light-hearted fun. It is in this state of mind that he meets the friars and discovers the first definition of Dowel. In light of Langland's constant derigration of the friars this episode clearly is not meant to answer the question of Dowel as much as to show, once again, the laxity of the friars and the superficiality of Will. Will's quick rebuttal shows he is not really looking for a definition of truth:

> Contra! quod I as a clerc, and comsed to disputen,
> And seide, "Soothly, Sepcies in die cadit iustus.
> Sevene sithes, seith the Book, synneth the rightfulle,
> And whoso synneth" I seide, "[certes] dooth yvele, as me thynketh,
> And Dowel and Do-yvele mowe noght dwelle togideres.
> Ergo he nys noght alwey at hoom amonges yow freres."
> VIII, 20-25

The friars enter into the debate with an equally facile answer: Dowel acts on a man like God's grace, protecting him from deadly sin and remaining with him even though he has committed venial sins:

> Synneth the sadde man [seven sithes a day].
> Ac dedly synne doth he noght, for Dowel hym kepeth
> And that is charite the champion, chief help ayein synne;
> For he strengtheth man to stonde and steereth mannes soul.
> VIII, 44-48

In this definition Dowel, like God's grace, appears not to need the willing consent of man. The friars' explanation is extremely one-sided for they leave out of their explanation the need for men to avoid venial sin, the link between venial and mortal sin, and the dangers of spiritual complacency. Ironically, the friars exhibit the faults that they overlook in their argument.

Will's next step is to search for his answers through the intellectual faculties. As he perseveres he becomes steadily more and more disciplined. In this first, small step of his search he examines all the available

information and draws conclusions from it. Slowly he becomes more and more disciplined in the search for Dowel. Thought and Wit make stabs at the general question but Dame Studie, Clergie and Scripture all lead the Dreamer through an exhaustive search of the known sources to find his answer. Will obviously enjoys being involved, is constantly "disputyng" and laying down his interpretation, however uninformed, against those of his teachers. Clearly, in comparison with the earlier waking search, he has become more deeply committed, if only intellectually. However, his search cannot continue to be simply an intellectual game. In order to see the truth he must be involved in the search at all levels of his being. The capacity for understanding Truth appears to be delineated by the capacity of the soul. Clearly, Will must be changed in order to receive the revelations of Truth. But Will cannot do this for himself as such a change occurs through the grace of God. This change is effected in Will by two very different kinds of visions: the dream of Fortune and the dream of Kynde.

The dream of Fortune and her subsequent betrayal exposes Will's true desires. He wishes to pursue a life of self-fulfillment, Fortune gives it to him; he wishes to be totally free to pursue his own desires, Fortune shows him how. He most certainly does not want to spend

precious time searching for Truth, especially since Truth would undoubtedly tell him to give up Fortune and her friends. It is only when Fortune leaves him and he fears for his soul that Will comes to his senses and renews his search. The search for Truth returns only when it is the sole choice he can make that will save his soul. Up to that point he has not acknowledged the importance of the quest; it has remained a playful pastime rather than a serious goal. Langland makes clear the paramount importance of the search to the future of the soul. He also clearly shows that it must be a pursuit that involves the entire person. With Fortune Langland shows the reader the dangers of the Flesh and the pursuit of one's lusts, as with Lady Mede he showed readers the danger of the World and the pursuit of power. Will returns to Clergie and the pursuit of Truth, but his attitude to learning has changed drastically. No longer wishing to play games with words, he returns to his search with a new dedication. Unlike the friars he searches for truth rather than a facile escape from the rigours of faith.

If the episode of Fortune chastens him, the dream of Kynde opens his eyes to the wonder of creation, deepening Will's perception of God and giving him the "kynde knowyng" he lacks:

> . . . and sithen cam Kynde
> And nempned me by my name, and bad me nymen hede
> And thorugh the wondres of this world wit for to take.
> And on a mountaigne that Myddelerthe highte, as me tho thoughte,
> I was fet forth by ensaumples to knowe,
> Thorugh ech a creature, Kynde my creatour to lovye.
> XI, 320-25

Through Kynde, Will's longing for marvels is now fulfilled, although in a way that he never expected. For Kynde works to hold the entire world in the pattern given to living things upon their creation. Will is shown the wonders of the world he has always seen but never known. The vision reveals a kind of knowledge which cannot be understood by the intellect alone. This vision and its subsequent explanation by Ymaginatif marks a new level of involvement on the Dreamer's part. Now his heart and imagination begin to interact with his mind as he steadily becomes more committed and involved in the search.

The next stage of Will's pilgrimage consists of penitence and repentance. In order for Will to continue the search for Truth he must now move from the first stage of his pilgrimage--an intellectual understanding of the tenets of faith--to the next level in his development--the conformity of the self to the disciplines of faith, such as fasting and prayer. This change is

symbolized by his new guides, Pacience and Conscience, who represent Christian attitudes. In the vision Pacience appears to represent self-denial as well as what we now consider to be patience. Conscience begins by guiding Will to his appointed place with Clergie where he can meet Pacience. There Will learns how a true believer can be shunned even by the supposed guardians of that faith. In this section Will interacts with the personifications in a new way, for he not only listens to their words but now acts them out. Thus, Will, who must practise patience as well as understand his words, moves from debate into action. This whole dream shows the necessity of behavioral changes and conformity to God rather than the world. For example, the meal with its many penitential dishes contrasts sharply with Clergie's meal. Such dishes as misere mei, Die or Agite penitenciam emphasize how repentance involves the entire body as well as the mind and imagination.

Paradoxically, as he becomes actively involved in Christian living during the dreams, Will becomes more and more incoherent and ineffective in his waking periods. Langland uses these intervals to illustrate that the holy cannot be translated; Will is distanced from the everyday world by his experiences. By Passus XV he is incoherent, unable to communicate with others:

> Ac after my wakynge it was wonder longe
> Er I koude kyndely knowe what was Dowel.
> And so my wit weex and wanyed til I a fool weere;
> And some lakked my lif--allowed it fewe--
> And leten me for a lorel and looth to reverencen
> . . . . . .
> That folk helden me a fool; and in that folie I raved.
>
> XV,1-5, 10

In his waking state everything appears out of focus. The waking state and the dream state seem to trade places, and only in the dream world does Will have full use of his faculties. In his waking state Will cannot remember or communicate anything he has experienced in the dream state. The further he goes on the path to Truth, the less he can communicate what he learns. Only when he has received full enlightenment can he return to the waking state and translate them into words that can be only partially understood by unenlightened people. It is why Langland encourages, even forces, the reader to redefine his assumptions. The only real way of finding Truth is to experience it for oneself.

In Passus XV when he meets Anima, the soul Will moves into the final stage of his quest. Anima's many names--mind, memory, the senses and the emotions--reveal how inclusive he is. Now that Will is totally committed to his quest with every faculty involved, he is finally capable of learning through direct revelation. Thus, he

can reach Piers and the Tree of Charity, the figures of Faith, Hope and Charity and see the Incarnation, Passion and Resurrection. He is also ready to take on the new challenge of helping the beleaguered Church against the Antichrist.

Langland uses the experiences of Will to take the reader on a journey to an understanding of Truth. He encourages the reader to question his assumptions by putting these same assumptions into Will's mouth. Thus the reader can see the various stages of growth that one must undergo in order to reach the truth. Moreover the reader recognizes that this growth does not simply happen by itself but must be sought for, prayed for and meditated on with one's whole concentration. Only the offering of one's entire self will lead to a new life.

The figure of Piers appears to be the exact opposite of Will. Will, the pilgrim, is forever in movement in his quest for knowledge of truth. Piers seems to be instinctively knowledgeable, "tending to embody what Langland takes to be the best insights at particular stages."[3] Thus Piers acts as a goal for both Will and the reader. Although Piers is only actively present three times in the poem, each time he appears he becomes more important, more closely identified with Christ. Piers is the New Man, redeemed and purified, revealing by

his actions the goodness of God and the glory of Christ.

Piers first appears as a humble farmer, a character rich in symbolism, and he never loses that aspect of his character. As Elizabeth Kirk notes:

> In his literal character as the farmer of another's land, Piers becomes the archetype of all those whose vocation in the world is their mode of serving God and man and their school of Truth. In an even larger sense, Piers as a farmer suggests archetypal man in terms used of his creation in Genesis. . . . the farmer is also the emblem of man bearing and responding to the effects of the Fall.[4]

The farmer, like Adam after the fall, implies the unredeemed man, but he also symbolizes the fruitful earth, and through this, the fruitfulness of various endeavours, including the spread of Christianity and the love of God. Piers is closely linked to fruitfulness and growth: he sows the half-acre and at the same time prepares the pilgrims for the service of Truth.

The plowing of the half-acre becomes a symbol of the ideal society in which all work in harmony one for another. The knight's job is to see that justice is done and that the weak are protected; clergy's to pray for the health of all souls. The rest of the commons must till for food, providing themselves and the other classes with food to sustain them. What begins as an image very quickly disintegrates when many of the pilgrims stop

working, wishing only to reap the benefits of the harvest without working. Piers calls Hunger to work with him and force the people back to work. Through this action Piers is shown to have great power given to him by St. Truth. This is the power of the "New Man," man redeemed, capable of recapturing man's dominion over the forces of nature.

Clearly Piers more than any other character bridges the gap between the concrete, physical world and the personifications. Whether he calls for Hunger's assistance or organizes the Ideal Christian society, he acts within and controls both worlds. Unlike Will, he rules the abstract world the personifications represent. In the same way, as a farmer he represents the world of the humble artisan, the way to Truth and the symbolic significance of the Sower who plants and harvests the saved. As his character unfolds and matures, he widens the scope of his farming but he never ceases to farm; he guards the Tree of Charity and, finally, sows the new Church. The more we learn about Piers the closer he comes to representing Christ.

Yet, in the final vignette of this episode Piers is shown as human as Will, capable of error and anger. Truth sends a message to Piers, telling him to stay home and giving him a pardon for all who have helped him. Langland spends a good deal of time discussing, and

satirizing, all the classes of society who are to receive this pardon. At the climax of this scene a priest offers to read the bull and "kenne it thee on Englissh" (VII,106). No pardon is found beyond the lines:

> ". . .Do wel and have wel and God shal have thi soule"
> And "Do yvel and have yvel, and hope thow noon oother
> That after thi deeth day the devel shal have thi soule!"
>
> VII, 112-14

Piers tears the pardon in half out of anger and vowing to leave his land and serve God through prayers and penance:

> Both the gesture of tearing the sacred document . . . and the sorrowing resolve to lead a new kind of life appropriately mark the change of the pious ploughman-preacher into a humbler, yet paradoxically a more awesome, leader of Christian folk. The outward gesture manifests. . . that Piers is freeing himself from the letter of the law.[3]

For Piers the pardon is a light by which he sees a better way to serve God. He discovers that, while the work ethic with which he has spent his life up to this point is a good way of service, there are other, better ways of serving God. He looks at his life and sees that he has spent too much time worrying over material goods and not enough time trusting God: "That loveth God lelly, his liflode is ful esy" (VII, 124). Work is shown to be only the first rung on the ladder toward the service of Truth.

Piers takes the step that is the death of the "old Adam" present in all of us and the birth of the "new man." Before Will considers it, Piers leads the way to salvation by being willing to give himself wholly to God. However, it must be emphasized that Piers makes this jump with difficulty. The tearing of the pardon "for pure tene" marks the anger of one who realizes that, despite all of his work, his salvation does not depend on his own efforts but on God's munificence. Like the man in the parable, Piers must be willing to give up all that he has and follow his master.

The identification of Piers with Christ is emphasized by Anima. When Will says that he would like to meet Charite, Anima unequivocally states: "Withouten help of Piers Plowman. . .his persone sestow nevere" (XV, 196), and, a few lines later, "But Piers the Plowman--Petrus, id est, Christus" (XV, 212). One cannot overlook this audacious claim--Piers and Christ are interchangeable, the one a substitute for the other. This statement is open to several different interpretations. One can interpret it as an allusion to I Corinthians 10:4--"and the rock [petra] was Christ"--or, possibly, to Mathew 16:18 in which Christ refers to Peter as the rock on which he will build the Church. It is also possible that Langland is referring to Paul's

statement "I live, yet not I, for Christ liveth in me" (Gal. 2:20). Any or all of these Biblical verses are an appropriate interpretation of the line, but, whatever else it does, it emphasizes the importance of Piers to the poem and gives him a new status, that of the imago dei. Langland did not mean for the quotation to be explained away; he wants to involve the reader, shock him and make him ask questions. Margaret Goldsmith notes:

> He presents more and more openly, the imago dei, the "true nature" of human beings as it is thought to be manifested in certain chosen messengers of God, the "apostles" who offer a forma justitia for their fellow-men.[6]

Piers has now been revealed in a new light, and it is important to understand his new position in the text. Only through Piers can Will and the reader meet Charity or God. This clearly implies that Piers is a type of Christ, who is the way to God, and the agent of salvation. David Aers has suggested that Piers is the lens through which Charity's "persona" is finally disclosed. Piers is presented as a lens to the reader in his further manifestations: as gardener of the Tree of Charity, as the armour of Christ, and as the founder of the Church. He is the focus that makes clear the enigma of the Godhead both as it pertains to the Tree of Charity and the Incarnation. In the final stage of his quest Will

must be able to experience the visions for himself, but he still needs help to penetrate the mysteries; he needs a guide who has, himself, experienced the Godhead, a whole man--a man transformed by God into the "New Man," the imago dei. Anima is capable of instructing Will in the theory of Charity, but only through direct vision can he gain the knowledge that will transform him.

The Tree of Charity episode marks a turning point in the narrative from quest to fulfillment, and indeed moves Will into another country, the country of Truth. At this level of learning Will receives information through direct vision. Langland presents Will's vision in the form of highly symbolic and complex sentence structures. From the beginning of Passus XVI he inundates the reader with a wealth of symbolism, puns, and double meanings. For example, the entrance into the Garden:

> "It groweth in a gardyn" quod he "that God made hymselve;
> Amyddes mannes body the more is of that stokke,
> Herte highte the herber that it inne groweth,
> And Liberum Arbitrium hath the lond to ferme,
> Under Piers the Plowman to piken it and to weden it."
>
> XVI, 13-17

The Tree of Charity, living as it does in a garden created by God's own hands, has an obvious analogue in the Tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden. One should note that Liberum Arbitrium, often defined as "Free

Will", can be translated as "Free Judgement." By using this particular name for the will, Langland emphasizes the need for active choice. The issue of judgement is as important to the "New Man" as it was to the Fall of the "Old Adam." Each soul makes the decision to grow one of these two seeds--either the seed of life, that is the Tree of Charity, or the seed of the Tree of Knowledge which brings death. Both reside in the Herte (XVI, 15) of man; man must choose which to nurture. Piers--gardener, guardian, and imago dei--acts as guide. Part of his importance in this episode is his role as completed man. He is the visual result of the search: he has already made the choice for God and is now transformed in the new life. Piers, therefore, acts as the gate both for Liberum Arbitrium (XVI, 16-17) and for Will. Through him Will can envision Charity.

As the episode continues, Piers becomes more than a guide. He is intimately connected with the Incarnation. As the gardener of the Tree it is Piers' fruit that flowers and ripens to the child Jesus (XVI, 94), and it is Piers who tutors the child and teaches him "lechecraft":

> And Piers the Plowman parceyved plener tyme,
> And lered hym lechecraft, his lif for to save.
> XVI, 103-104

These two lines seem to be referring to Jesus' miraculous healings, but the relationship is unclear. However, it is clear that Piers has been transformed once again. From *imago dei* he has become *imago hominis* and in this guise interacts with Christ.

Piers appears again in Passus XVIII, where he is seen through a window by Faith. In this scene Piers represents unredeemed Man: "and fecche that the fende claymeth--Piers fruyt the Plowman." (XVIII, 20) The curious word order of this assertion encloses the fruit, humanity, inside Piers Plowman. This statement recalls Piers protecting the Tree of Charity and the fruit itself, which grows into the Lord Jesus. His role here is somewhat similar; he fights a losing battle with the devil until Jesus can fight him in his stead. Langland exploits Christ's representation as Second Person of the Trinity, fully human and fully God, in his representation of Piers as Christ:

> This Jesus of his gentries wol juste in Piers armes,
> In his helm and in his haubergeon--*humana natura*
> That Crist be noght biknowe here for *consummatis Deus*
> In Piers paltok the Plowman this prikiere shal ryde.
> XVIII, 22-25

Piers Plowman once again surrounds the word "paltok" and becomes the substitute himself encircled by Christ. Over and over Langland uses circular chains of reasoning: the

changing fruit of the Tree of Charity that changes to the Incarnation; Piers as guardian and tutor encircling the young Christ; Piers as humanity; Piers protecting and nurturing the fruit of the tree, the fruit of Mary and the fruit of humanity. These chains of reasoning mirror the circles of the Ptolemeic universe in which each successive ring encircles the previous ones and all are encircled by the Love of God. Langland shows that even the redemption of man in part rests in the delicate balance of relationships between man and God. Piers, as man's representative, has lost the sharp delineation of Passus VI and VII. He is now a focal point for both man and God, the mold God shapes to redeem Man. The identification is so close that Will cannot separate them:

> . . . and sodeynly me mette
> That Piers the Plowman was peynted al blody,
> And com in with a cros bifore the commune peple,
> And right lik in alle lymes to Oure Lord Jesu.
> And thanne called I Conscience to kenne me sothe:
> Is this Jesus the justere," quod I "that Jewes dide to dethe?
> Or is it Piers the Plowman! . . .
>
> XIX, 5-10

Jesus' death on the Cross unites man and God in a new way; they are one. Langland, who can only show the reader the events at second hand, reiterates his explanation: Jesus is only using Piers' arms. In this case the dividing line between disguise and reality is

very close; one cannot say where Piers ends and Jesus begins.

Piers' next, and last, appearance portrays him as Man Triumphant. In Piers man is redeemed and victorious over sin and death. The accounts, symbolized by the phrase "redde quod debes," are paid by Christ. Piers appears again in the character of farmer, but is now appointed to sow the seed of salvation:

> My prowor and my plowman Piers shal ben on erthe,
> And for to tilie truthe . . . . .
>
> XIX, 262-63

Piers has the responsibility of forming and cultivating the Church, through whom men would be saved. He is given all the tools he needs by Grace, including the Gospels, the Church Fathers, the Bible, the Cardinal virtues and the Cross. With these he harrows and ploughs Man's heart and builds the Church. He has become the agent of the Holy Spirit.

The figure of Piers is not a simple character to define. While not a personification in the accepted sense, the figure of Piers acts as a multivalent symbol on several levels. He never loses his original character as a plowman, but it never completely describes him either. Piers is at once a humble farmer and the image of God, human and divine, a member of humanity and a

to eternal life; in the end he is the only hope of a beleaguered church.

Together Will and Piers define and delineate the quest of the poem. Both show that Truth resides in individual perception. Piers, already a "new man," proceeds from one task to the next taking on greater and greater responsibilities. Will grows from a childish, ignorant tramp to a completely changed responsible adult ready for greater responsibilities. Their search for Truth never ceases because it can never be wholly known or comprehended. That is the essence of the quest; there are always new worlds to conquer.

CONCLUSION

Journey's End

At the beginning of Piers Plowman Langland pictures Middle Earth and contemporary society between the Tower of Truth and the Dale of Hell, showing that everyday life and everyday decisions have consequences in eternity. He spends the rest of the poem leading the reader to the path to Heaven. The journey involves a close examination of contemporary society and its counterpart, the ideal Christian society, and the path to individual salvation. Langland uses the dream vision to bring the abstract elements into the realm of the concrete. The dream vision gives freedom to experiment and test theories. Thus the Dreamer finds himself observing and participating in a host of different settings.

The dream world of the poem encloses the many worlds through which Will must travel. Will moves from the world of everyday society to the world of the intellect, the emotions and, finally, the world of self-discipline and commitment to God. After he has journeyed through these worlds and learnt what they have to offer him, Will is finally able to move into a new world in which he can receive direct revelation from God and learn in an entirely new fashion. Each level of experience adds to

the previous experiences, and symbols gain more and more meanings with each step forward. The return to the World and the search for Piers Plowman in Passus XX brings the knowledge gained back into Middle Earth and the reader back to a new pilgrimage. The different levels are connected directly through the Dreamer's journey and indirectly through themes and subthemes, characters and language.

Piers Plowman is made up of these interlocking series of patterns including the interlocking components of structure, the overlapping vignettes and Will's movement through the successive layers of enlightenment. All the multitude of stories, examples and debates work together in the poem to lead the reader into an experiential understanding of the truths which he has, up to this point, taken for granted. Although Langland is not theologically innovative, he does show that theological truth in a new light. He compels the reader to encounter imaginatively the Truth hidden in everyday truisms.

The aim of the poem is to involve the reader in the search for Truth and help him to understand the complexity underlying the most obvious cliches. To accomplish this Langland uses a wide range of rhetorical devices. This thesis has examined several of these and

has shown the craft inherent in the fluid surfaces of the poem. Langland has created a kaleidoscopic vision of man and his search for Truth and, through the intricate web of scenes, actions, and debates, succeeded in engaging the reader in the quest.

NOTES

Introduction

[1] C.S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love (London, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1936), 161.

[2] A.V.C. Schmidt, "Introduction," William Langland, The Vision of Piers Plowman, ed. A.V.C. Schmidt (London and Melbourne: Dent, 1973), xi, xv, xxxv.

Chapter One

[1] Piers Plowman is extant in three different versions: the A text (produced in 1362) and the much longer B and C texts (1367-69 and 1378 respectively). Despite the changes Langland made in each version, the structural principles of the three texts remain substantially the same. I am using the B text as the basic text for this study since it is the most complete, containing material which is not in the A or C texts. In

addition to these three texts there is the Z text, now believed to be anterior to A. For more information about the Z text see Piers Plowman: The Z Version, ed. A.G. Rigg and Charlotte Brewer, Studies and Texts 59 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1983); Hugh White, "The Z Text: A New Version of Piers Plowman?" Medium Aevum 53 (1984), 290-94; and A.V.C. Schmidt, "The Authenticity of the Z Text of Piers Plowman: A Metrical Examination" Medium Aevum 53 (1984), 295-300.

[2] J.J. Jusserand, Piers Plowman: A Contribution to the History of English Mysticsm, trans. M.E.R. (New York: Russell and Russell, 1894); quoted by A.J. Colaianne, "Structure and Foreconceit in Piers Plowman: Some Observations on Langland's Psychology of Composition," Annuale Medievale 22 (1982), 107.

[3] See Henry Wells, "The Construction of Piers Plowman" PMLA 44 (1929), 123-40; rpt. Interpretations of Piers Plowman, ed. E. Vasta (London and Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), 1-21. T.P. Dunning "Structure of the B Text of Piers Plowman," RES n.s. 7 (1956), 225-37. R.W. Frank, Piers Plowman and the Scheme of Salvation: An Interpretation of Dowel, Dobet

Lives," RES n.s. 7 (1956), 132-50; rpt. Interpretations of Piers Plowman, 233.

[5] A.G. Mitchell, "Lady Mede and the Art of Piers Plowman," Charles Memorial Lecture (London: H.K. Lewis, 1956); rpt. Style and Symbolism in Piers Plowman, ed. R. Blanch (Knoxville: University of Tenessee Press, 1969), 174.

[6] Wells, 123-40; rpt. Interpretations of Piers Plowman, 1-21. See also Wells, "The Philosophy of Piers Plowman" PMLA, 53 (1938), 339-49; rpt. in Interpretations, 259-77.

[7] Dunning, 259-77. Other critics include Nevill Coghill, "The Character of Piers Plowman Considered from the B-Text," Medium Aevum, 2 (1933), 108-35; rpt. Interpretations, 54-86; D.W. Robertson, "Piers Plowman and Scriptural Tradition," Interpretations, 190-216; John Lawlor, "The Imaginative Unity in Piers Plowman," RES n.s. 8 (1957), 113-26; rpt. Interpretations, 278-97.

[8] Dunning, Interpretations, 274.

[8] Dunning, Interpretations, 274.

[9] Coghill, Interpretations, 54-86.

[10] Dunning, Interpretations, 262.

[11] R.W. Frank, Piers Plowman and the Scheme of Salvation: An Interpretation of Dowel, Dobet and Dobest (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), 16.

[12] Frank, 18.

[13] Frank, 42.

[14] Frank, 16

[15] J.A. Burrow, "Words, Work and Will: Theme and Structure in Piers Plowman," Piers Plowman: Critical Approaches, ed. S.S. Hussey (London: Methuen, 1969), 124.

[16] John J. Lawlor, "The Imaginative Unity of Piers Plowman," Interpretations, 296-97.

[17] James I. Wimsatt, Allegory and Mirror: Tradition and Structure in Middle English Literature (New York: Pegasus, 1970), 19.

[18] Jesse Gellrich, The Idea of the Book in the Middles Ages (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), 31-32.

[19] Robert M. Jordan, Chaucer and the Shape of Creation: The Aesthetic Possibilities of Inorganic Structure (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967), 42.

[20] Gellrich, 50.

[21] Jordan, 34.

[22] Jordan, 5.

[23] Elizabeth Kirk, The Dream Thought of Piers Plowman (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1972), 1-2.

[24] Elizabeth Salter, Piers Plowman: An Introduction (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962), 57.

[25] William Langland, The Vision of Piers Plowman, ed. A.V.C. Schmidt (London: Dent, 1978), 42. All quotations from the poem are taken from this edition and will be cited by passus and line number only following the quotation.

[26] A.C. Spearing, Medieval Dream-Poetry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 5.

[27] Spearing, 142.

[28] Spearing, 6.

[29] A.V.C. Schmidt, "Introduction," xx.

[30] Judith Anderson, The Growth of a Personal Voice: Piers Plowman and the Faerie Queen (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1976), 5.

Chapter Two

[1] Dante, Letter to Can Grande, Dantis Alagherii

Epistolas: The Letters of Dante, trans. Paget Toynbee (Oxford:Clarendon Press, 1920), 199.

[2] Mary Carruthers, The Search for St. Truth: A Study of Meaning in Piers Plowman, (Evanston: North Western University Press, 1973), 36-37.

[3] A.G. Mitchell, "Lady Mede and the Art of Piers Plowman," Style and Symbolism in Piers Plowman, ed. R.J. Blanch (Knoxville: University of Tenessee Press, 1969), 175.

[4] Lavinia Griffiths, Personification in Piers Plowman, Piers Plowman Studies 3 (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1985), 105.

[5] Griffiths, 26.

[6] See Griffiths, 30-31, and Myra Stokes, Justice and Mercy in Piers Plowman (London and Canberra: Croom Helm, 1984), 99.

[7] "And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and

pearls . . ." (Rev. 17:4).

[8] Stokes, 101.

[9] Stokes, 104.

[10] Judith Anderson, The Growth of a Personal Voice: Piers Plowman and the Faerie Queen (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1976), 69.

[11] Mitchell, 193.

[12] "And somme murthes to make as myhstrels konne,/ And geten gold with hire glee--giltless, I leeve" (Pro., 33-34).

[13] Daniel Murtaugh, Piers Plowman and the Image of God (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1978), 107.

Chapter Three

[1] Elizabeth Kirk, The Dream Thought of Piers Plowman

(New Haven London: Yale University Press, 1972), 35.

[2] Elton D. Higgs, "The Path to Involvement: The Centrality of the Dreamer in Piers Plowman," Tulane Studies in English, 21 (1974), 2.

[3] David Aers, Piers Plowman and Christian Allegory (London: Edward Arnold, 1975), 79.

[4] Kirk, 73.

[5] Margaret Goldsmith, The Figure of Piers Plowman: The Image on the Coin, Piers Plowman Studies 2 (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1981), 45.

[6] Goldsmith, 26.

[7] Aers, 88.

ABBREVIATIONS

AnM	Annuale Mediaevale
BGDSL	Beitrage zur Geschiete Deutschen Sprache und Literatur
EC	Etudes Celtiques
ES	English Studies: A Journal of English Language and Literature
JEGP	Journal of English and Germanic Philology
M&H	Mediaevale et Humanistica: Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Cultures
MAE	Medium Aevum
MLR	Modern Language Review
MS	Medieval Studies
NLH	New Literary History: A Journal of Literary Theory and Interpretation
NM	Neuphilogische Mitteilungen
PMLA	Publications of the Modern Language Association of America
RES	Review of English Studies: A Quarterly Journal of English Literature and the English Language
SP	Studies in Philology

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